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Marble is a Hard Business

Less blasting results in more profit for Nangarhar marble quarries



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Laborers processing marble at the Sahil Tora Bora Marble Processing Facility, Surkh Road District, Nangarhar Province.

Afghanistan is rich in raw marble deposits that can be extracted and processed domestically. Further development of the marble sector has huge potential for revenue generation and employment creation.

Afghan white marble, primarily from the Spin Ghar mountain range in Nangarhar Province, is well known internationally as a high-quality stone, but is hard to get to market. New technology is helping. Processed marble production in the eastern region is approximately 720,000 square feet annually, an amount that could dramatically increase with proper management, equipment, and technical skills.

One impediment to production of high-quality finished marble is bad technology. Blasting is a common method of extracting the marble from the quarries resulting in waste of up to 80 percent. This method lowers the quality and market price of the final product.

In Surkh Rod District of Nangarhar Province, the Sahil Tora Bora Marble Processing Plant improved their extraction and production processes with assistance from USAID. As part of their contribution to this venture, the marble processing plant procured a crane to enable their processing facility to handle the large, uncut blocks of marble from the quarries while using a USAID value-chain improvement grant to procure drilling equipment, diamond wires saws, and diamond wire.

With this equipment, the company has increased annual production from 1,080 tons to more than 3,600 tons, resulting in total annual sales of nearly \$297,000, a nearly 300 percent increase from previous years. "Before USAID support, we were using explosives for extraction of marble from the mountains, which caused fractures in the stone. The explosives also created irregularly shaped blocks, which were difficult to work with," said Haji Ruhullah, the deputy director of Sahil Tora Bora Marble Processing Plant. "With the help of efficient equipment, we have greatly increased our overall production and sales."

Through USAID's wider support to the marble sector in Afghanistan, including annual marble conferences and international trade shows, Sahil has identified export opportunities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and China.